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SUBJECT: EMBASSY DONATES 280 WHEELCHAIRS TO OMAN

Summary

1. On June 13, the Ambassador presided over a well-publicized ceremony to donate 280 wheelchairs to Helping Hands, a local charitable organization. The ceremony was the culmination of an offer made by the Department one year ago. End summary.

Getting It Rolling

2. The idea for a wheelchair donation to Oman sprang from a conversation in 2004 between Oman's Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yusuf bin Alawi and then-Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Margaret Tutwiler in Washington. Since that time, a host of individuals in Oman and the United States worked diligently to turn the vision of a wheelchair donation into a reality. The donation was made possible through the generosity of The Wheelchair Foundation, an American non-profit organization established by philanthropist Kenneth Behring. Mr. Behring's organization has donated almost 400,000 wheelchairs to over 130 countries in the five years since the creation of the Foundation.

Mobility, Dignity, and Freedom

3. The exceptional efforts to bring the chairs to Oman culminated in a ceremony on June 13 at the Embassy's new "Majan" warehouse in Muscat. Standing near the 280 wheelchairs, the Ambassador thanked the assembled guests - who included representatives from the Ministries of Social Development, Justice, and Education - and remarked that "the mere act of getting around, which most of us take for granted, is a daily struggle for the disabled. We hope that our donation will contribute in some small way towards alleviating that plight." Elizabeth al-Sarhani of Helping Hands accepted the wheelchairs on behalf of her organization, which is involved in myriad charitable activities in various locations around Oman.

4. The wheelchairs come in five different sizes to accommodate both adults and children. Helping Hands plans to distribute the chairs to needy recipients at hospitals and disabled associations all around the Sultanate. At the end of the ceremony, the Ambassador wished "mobility, dignity, and freedom" for all the recipients of the wheelchairs.

Heavy Rotation In The Media

5. Press coverage of the event was outstanding. All six major daily newspapers in the Sultanate carried prominent features about the donation. For example, the widely read Arabic-language daily "al-Watan" ran a nearly half-page article on page 3 of its June 14 edition about the ceremony, complete with two color photographs of the Ambassador and the wheelchairs. On the back page of its June 14 edition, the government-owned Arabic daily "Oman" featured an article and a color photograph of the wheelchairs next to the American flag. Also on June 14, the English-language daily "Times of Oman" published a nearly half-page article on page 5, highlighted by large photographs of the event. Each newspaper quoted liberally from the Embassy's press release and the Ambassador's speech, and the tone of the articles was uniformly positive.

Round Of Applause

6. The Embassy would like to thank The Wheelchair Foundation and the Office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs for making this donation possible. This donation will have a meaningful impact on the lives of the recipients and generated some very positive press coverage for the U.S.

BALTIMORE